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Carter angry at 'insult' White House aides clai Reagan remarks distor

By Thomas D. Brandt
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Congressional Democrats have characterized as "unfair and untrue" President Reagan's suggestion that the recent bomb attack on the U.S. Embassy in Beirut was due to Carter administration policies, while the White House said the president's remarks had been distorted.

The chairman of the House Intelligence Committee and the vice chairman of the Senate intelligence panel, both Democrats, yesterday said that the CIA's post-Vietnam budget decline had actually been reversed by Mr. Carter and anti-terrorism intelligence "received higher and higher priorities."

Mr. Carter, in a rare reaction to a comment by Mr. Reagan, said the president's claim "that his predecessors are responsible for the repeated terrorist bombings of Americans is personally insulting and too gross in its implications to ignore."

In the statement released by his office in Atlanta, Mr. Carter said a series of terrorist bombings directed at Americans in Lebanon "has been brought about by the president's own deeply flawed policy and inadequate security precautions in the face of proven danger."

The president's press spokesman, Larry Speakes, said Mr. Reagan did not mean to blame the Carter administration but a decade-long "climate in Congress that resulted in inadequate funding and support for intelligence-gathering capabilities" during both the Ford and Carter administrations.

"Specifically, human intelligence capabilities had been weakened considerably in that decade [the 1970s], partly because of lack of support, partly because of the confidence and trust abroad," Mr. Speakes told reporters in an exhaustive question-and-answer session about Mr. Reagan's remark.

The controversy was triggered Wednesday when Mr. Reagan, replying to a question at Bowling Green University in Ohio about whether embassy security around the world would have to be beefed up after last week's bombing, said:

"The real protection and where we're feeling the effects today of the near destruction of our intelligence capability in recent years — before we came here — the effort that somehow to say, well, spying is somehow dishonest and let's get rid of our intelligence agents, and we did that to a large extent."

He added, "We're trying to rebuild our intelligence to where you'll find out and know in advance what the target might be and be prepared for it."

Yesterday, posing for pictures in the Rose Garden with President Fernando Belaunde Terry of Peru, Mr. Reagan told reporters:

"I will answer your questions about the way you have distorted my remarks about the CIA." But he returned to his office without answering any questions or explaining what he meant.

Some White House aides traveling with Mr. Reagan on Wednesday told reporters the president meant to refer to the Carter administration. But the aides spoke off the record, and Mr. Speakes said yesterday that no one was authorized to say that.

Rep. Edward Boland, D-Mass., chairman of the House intelligence panel, outlined the bolstering of intelligence functions approved by Congress during the Carter and Reagan years and said "shortcomings on terrorism . . . are shortcomings of this administration, which has had four years to solve any problems."

"What happened during the Carter and Reagan years is that new requirements — for economic intelligence, drug trafficking intelligence, terrorist intelligence, third world military intelligence, etcetera — were added. As a result, new personnel and larger budgets were requested. . . . Congress by and large supported these requests."

Vice President George Bush, during a campaign appearance in Saginaw, Mich., yesterday said that while he believes intelligence-gathering capabilities have been damaged over the years, he would not blame the Beirut bombings on the Carter-Mondale administration.

Mr. Bush, a former director of the CIA, told reporters he believes the president was referring to budget cuts and congressional hearings that "blew the cover" of some foreign sources.

"It's difficult to build up sources if they believe their cover is going to be blown in public," Mr. Bush said. But he added that the U.S. has the best intelligence system in the world and that it is virtually impossible to defend against fanatic terrorists.

Sen. Patrick Moynihan, D-N.Y., vice chairman of the Senate intelligence panel, said the president's statement "betrays . . . almost a decade of sustained bipartisan efforts in the Congress to reconstruct an intelligence community whose budgets had run down steadily through the first half of the 1970s [during the Vietnam wind-down] and began to rise sharply in the second half."

Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., chairman of the panel, had no comment on the issue, but he did join yesterday with Mr. Moynihan in introducing legislation requiring that the director and deputy director of the CIA be career intelligence officers from the military or civilian sectors and not political appointees.

Mr. Moynihan said the positions are of such critical importance to the nation that the people who fill them should come from professional rather than political ranks so "that their judgments reflect an independent evaluation of the facts and proposed courses of action."

Mr. Moynihan also released a copy of a March 8 letter from CIA director William J. Casey that said:

"All of us know that the increase in the personnel and budgetary strength of the agency began in 1979, that it was planned and proposed earlier . . ."

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., another member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said on the CBS "Morning News" yesterday that Mr. Reagan's charge is "an outrageous distortion of the facts."

"The biggest initial increase in the intelligence budget came during the Carter years," Mr. Leahy said. "The Reagan budget is basically a continuation of what President Carter started, so . . . it's hard to tell any difference between the two. They've both had bipartisan support."

According to preliminary State Department findings on last week's bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, the principle weakness at the facility was that the terrorists struck before all security measures had been completed.

President Reagan received the initial report yesterday from Ambassador Robert Oakley, director of the State Department's office to combat terrorism.

According to a White House spokesman, Mr. Oakley told the president that moving the embassy operations to new quarters in the east Beirut annex "was safer" than retaining the entire staff in west Beirut.

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